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Lead cleanup plan worries

By Laurie Sybert

Belleville News-Democrat

GRANITE CITY — City leaders are concerned that the federal government may be attacking the area's lead cleanup plan in reverse.

"One of the city's primary issues in the case is the concern for recontamination from the pile — whether it is capped or removed — if either takes place after further lead removal has begun," Granite City attorney Ed Fitzhenry said Friday.

There are two projects: scraping lead-tainted soil from residents' yards and dealing with 250,000 tons of lead slag left by a defunct smelter. Current plans by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are to first make a decision about the yards.

Granite City Mayor Ron Selph said he wants to have the lead pile removed from the city. He is worried that if yards are cleaned first, moving the lead piles will kick up dust and recontaminate the yards.

The problem facing Fitzhenry and Selph is that the EPA is further ahead on the yard cleanup plan than the pile plan.

"I believe we're putting finishing touches on the soil report now," EPA spokesman Sue Pastor said, but she could not say when the full report might be completed.

Pastor and other EPA representatives will be at a March 6 public meeting in Granite City to hear public comment on the agency's proposal to leave the pile at the site.

The public comment period on the EPA plan to scrape the top 6 inches of topsoil from a 55-square-block area ended more than a month ago, while the comment period on the pile plan doesn't end until March 20, Pastor said.

The targeted soil area includes



CONTROVERSIAL PILE: Granite City officials say they want to have the slag pile removed before

any soil that has tested over 500 parts per million for lead contamination, based on the EPA March 1990 cleanup plan.

In September, Granite City filed a lawsuit to stop soil removal.

After two days in federal court, the city and EPA agreed to continue soil cleanup at severely contaminated sites in the 1400 blocks of State, Grand and Madison streets. Part of the negotiated agreement also called for a scientific consortium between the EPA and known blood lead experts to discuss a change in the level at which contaminated soil should be removed. Discussions

centered around raising the level at which yards should be cleaned, Fitzhenry said.

"We're hopeful those discussions had an impact on what the EPA may choose to do," he said.

Selph has pledged legal action by the city if the EPA goes forward with the plan to leave the pile in the city.

But other legal action may be taken if the soil removal begins before the pile plan is finalized.

"It is possible the City Council may consider an injunction (to stop it) if soil remediation is begun before action on the pile is final-

ized," Fitzhenry said.

So far the EPA has spent \$1.1 million from its Superfund cleanup fund to remove lead contamination from alleys in Venice, Maclellan, Eagle Park Acres and Granite City, and to scrape topsoil from a handful of yards in Granite City.

Costs for soil removal from the 55-block area have been estimated up to \$20 million. The EPA estimate for moving the slag pile out of the city is \$34.6 million while leaving the pile in Granite City is estimated at \$4.8 million.

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Ward 2 Alderman Craig Tarpoff
believe the millions of dollars would
be better spent removing lead paint
both inside and outside homes in the
contaminated area.

"If they want to spend their mon-
ey wisely, they will use it to get rid
of the lead paint in the area because
if they leave it, it's just going to
recontaminate the ground they want
to clean," Tarpoff said.

Granite City and the surrounding
areas were contaminated by lead
particles emitted into the air during
80 years of lead smelting by the
now-defunct NL Industries.